$50.2 Million Radio Fund Approved

House Acts to Save RFE

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The House took action yesterday that assures that Soviet and East European citizens will be able to turn their radio dials to what they sometimes call "our stations in the stars" for at least another year.

After a debate in which many legislators defended the need for Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty during a time of detente with the Communist nations, the House passed by a vote of 313 to 90 a Senate-approved bill that authorized $50.2-million in funding for the stations in the next fiscal year.

For the first time, the bill establishes a mechanism for public control of the stations, a seven-member International Broadcasting Board, which will allocate funds and evaluate performance. In part, the creation of the board was a response to criticism that the stations were dispensing "propaganda" which was not always consistent with U.S. foreign policy objectives. The board will be made up of the two station directors and five presidential appointees who must be confirmed by the Senate.

The bill easily passed in the Sen. J. W .Fulbright (D-Ark.) was defeated. The Fulbright change, reflecting his longstanding opposition to the stations, would have prevented the United States from paying more than half their costs after 1975. The measure now goes to the White House for a presidential signature.

Administration officials said the measure reflected "sophistication" in Congress about the function of the stations. In the past, they have been blamed for heightening East-West tensions. Supporters argued, howvr, that th stations actually contribut to detente by stimulating public opinion in the Communist countries and forcing the governments to be more responsive to Western detente proposals.

Rep. Charles W. Whalen Jr. (R-Ohio) said the stations can make a "contribution to true detente." He said the Soviet Union was trying to control opinion at home while expanding its trade and technological exchanges with the West. Without Radio Liberty (which transmits to the Soviet Union), the citizens of that country would not have known about the sale of U.S. grain to their country, or about the details of Soviet arms supply to the Arab nations, he said.

The debate also made clear that despite the administration's detente initiatives, suspicion of Soviet motives is still running high in Congress. Rep. Edward J. Derwinski (R-Ill.), citing suppression of Soviet intellectuals and disclosures that the Soviets were delivering new supersonic jet bombers to Iraq, said: "We have as many problems with the Soviet Union as ever ... this is a good investment."

The passage of the bill ended for mow a long controvtrsy over the stations that began in 1971 when Congress denied them further covert funding from the Central Intelligence Agency budget. A presidential study commission this year reported that the operation of the stations were in the U.S. interests but proposed more controls.

Radio Liberty, which transmits to the Soviet Union, and Radio Free Europe, which broadcasts to Eastern Europe, are both headquartered in Munich, Germany. The stations are still widely heard in places where jamming does not prevent reception.